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The National Shoreline

The national shoreline provides critical baseline data to manage coastal resources and define America's territorial limits, including its Exclusive Economic Zone. The national shoreline is fundamental to the growth of the nation's shipping, manufacturing, export, coastal development, and insurance industries. An accurate, consistent, and up-to-date national shoreline can:

- improve charts for navigation and harbor docking,
- provide accurate storm surge, coastal flooding, and pollution trajectory modeling,
- improve land and marine geographic information systems,
- provide accurate environmental analysis and monitoring.

Various federal, state, and local authorities often use inconsistent shoreline definitions for maps, charts, and geographic information systems. Mean high water (MHW) and mean lower low water (MLLW) are used to describe the coastline on nautical charts. MHW defines the boundary between private and state or federal ownership. MLLW sets the boundary between state and federal authority. Often these authorities use or produce maps describing mean sea level as the shoreline, which can lead to confusion.

NOAA nautical charts describe the shoreline as the line where the average high tide, MHW, intersects the coast. NOAA shoreline mapping also shows where MLLW intersects the coast. Broader use of the NOAA-provided national shoreline is expected to help alleviate problems encountered by using inconsistent shoreline definitions.

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On the Web at: www.ngs.noaa.gov/INFO/OnePagers/shoreline_page.htm

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Ocean Service
National Geodetic Survey

The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) defines and manages the National Spatial Reference System, which determines position, height, distance, direction, gravity, and shoreline throughout the United States. Since 1807 NGS and its predecessor agencies have led the world in precise positioning and developed emerging technologies for the public. NGS provides its expertise and a wealth of free information, including direct access to its data base, on the World Wide Web at: www.ngs.noaa.gov



Positioning America

for the Future

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